DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 253 918 EA 017 040

AUTHOR Mersky, Ronald
TITLE Management Practices: A Major Cause of Stress among Teachers.
PUB DATE 15 Nov 83
NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Southern Regional Council on Educational Administration (Knoxville, TN, November 13-15, 1983).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Affective Measures; Discipline; Educational Environment; Elementary Secondary Education; Research Needs; Rural Schools; *Stress Variables; Teacher Administrator Relationship; *Teacher Morale; *Teacher Response; *Teaching (Occupation); *Teaching Conditions; Work Environment
IDENTIFIERS Kentucky (East); *Management Practices; *Teaching Events Stress Inventory

ABSTRACT

This research studies task-based stress among teachers in a rural setting. A 51-item instrument was administered to teachers in 12 schools to determine (1) the extent of differential reactions to a wide range of task-based teaching events, as correlated with situational characteristics (sex, age, elementary or secondary affiliation, school size); and (2) the magnitude of stress associated with each teaching event listed. Two patterns of events emerging from the study suggest that a high degree of stress among teachers in eastern Kentucky is associated with management practices: action over which teachers have little control, and events associated with the theme of violence/student discipline. The least stressful events centered around the theme of pedagogical activities: lesson plans, inservice meetings, and student evaluation. Based on the research, basic issues are identified that are in need of further study: relationship of perceived stress to internal factors, whether it is harmful to teaching performance, and whether the degree of stress differs between effective and ineffective schools. Many of the most stressful events concerned physical safety and economic security. The research suggests that a logical point of intervention in reducing stessful teaching conditions is the improvement of management practices. Tables provide the demographic characteristics of the sample and the original Teaching Events Stress Inventory. An 11-item reference list is included. (TE)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED253918

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Ronald Mersky
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

EA

Management Practices:

A Major Cause of Stress Among Teachers

A paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the
Southern Regional Council on Educational Administration,
Knoxville, Tennessee, November 15, 1983.

Ronald Mersky
Associate Professor
Department of Leadership and Foundations
School of Education
Morehead State University
Morehead, Kentucky

EA 017 040

Since the mid 1970's, numerous teacher stress articles have appeared in education journals. Most of the articles have been concerned with attempts to provide teachers with more effective coping skills. Such skills may be helpful to teachers in dealing with much of the task-based stress (problems associated with a variety of specific tasks that a teacher must perform in his/her teaching role) about which they can do very little (Pettegrew and Wolf, 1982). It is reasonable to assume, however, that attempts to merely cope with task-based stress may lead to frustration since the cause(s) have not been addressed.

Recent research suggests that most highly ranked task-based stressors associated with teaching are closely linked with management practices. Cichon and Koff (1980) employing a modified version of the Social Readjustment Rating Scale developed by Holmes and Rahe (1967) found that management practices are associated with the highly ranked task-based stressors found among teachers in Chicago. More recent research conducted by Pettegrew and Wolf in a metropolitan area in the Southeast supports the Cichon and Koff findings.

Both of the aforementioned studies noted that there was a need to expand the research on task-based stress to teachers in rural settings. This research partially fills the void by studying task-based stress among teachers in a rural setting (Eastern Kentucky).

The specific purposes of the research were to:

1. Determine the extent of differential reactions to task-based teaching events by teachers in a rural setting with different situational characteristics (e.g. sex, age, elementary or secondary affiliation, school size).

2. Determine the magnitude of stress associated with task-based teaching events among teachers in a rural setting.

Methodology

The study used the thirty-six item instrument developed by Cichon and Koff. The subjects were asked to respond to the task-based teaching events on a Likert seven point scale (ranging from very little stress to very high stress). The teachers responses were based on the following question: Considering your teaching situation, what degree of stress does the possibility or the actual occurrence of the following events cause you?

In order to ensure that a wide range of task-based teaching events endemic to Eastern Kentucky were tested, fifteen additional items were added. These items were added after a pilot test was conducted and analyzed for the purpose of refinement.

No problems occurred in obtaining the cooperation of schools in Eastern Kentucky, primarily because teacher stress had been identified as the first priority for teacher in-service by a committee which included the Kentucky Bureau of Instruction and the Kentucky Education Association. Twelve (six elementary and six secondary) were randomly selected on the basis of geographic location (two elementary and two secondary from each of three sub-regions). The schools were also selected on the basis of size. Each sub-region had selected from it one small elementary school and one small secondary school (less than 20 teachers). The same procedure was used to select large schools (more than 30 teachers).

The fifty-one item instrument was administered to all of the teachers in the twelve schools in a group setting in order to provide as much consistency as possible. Two-hundred and eighty nine teachers turned in acceptable responses.

Findings

Discriminant function analysis was performed between subgroups from the list of demographic characteristics (Table 1). The fifty-one events served as the independent variables. The results obtained from the analysis was consistent with those reported by Cichon and Koff (1980) and by Holmes and Rahe (1967). That is, discriminant analysis revealed no significant differences between the sub-groups compared in this study.

An analysis of the rank order of task-based teaching events revealed significant evidence with regard to what types of items apparently cause a high degree of stress among teachers in Eastern Kentucky (Table 2).

Two patterns of events emerged from the original thirty-six item instrument which suggests that a high degree of stress among teachers in Eastern Kentucky is associated with "management practices". Events 6, 7, 11, 13, 23, 29, and 34 represent actions which teachers have little control over and are considered to be management responsibility. These events were all ranked in the top ten as high stressors with the exception of item 13 (Implementing board of education curriculum goals). This pattern of management responsibility is, for the most part, consistent with the Cichon and Koff findings. Item 13 is an exception since teachers in Chicago also found the implementation of board of education goals to be a high stress item. A possible explanation for this difference is that teachers in Eastern Kentucky feel less stress associated with implementing board of education curriculum goals since boards of education in Eastern Kentucky tend not to be concerned with curricular matters.

The second pattern of events associated with management practices cluster around the theme of violence/student discipline. While it is

acknowledged that teachers may have some control over events representing violence/student discipline, research supports the belief that violence/student discipline is influenced to a greater extent by management practices (Bookover and others, 1979; Edmunds, 1979). Events 3, 12, 16 and 21 relate to violence/student discipline. These items ranked as the 3rd, 7th, 9th and 11th most stressful items for teachers in Eastern Kentucky. This relatively high degree of stress is consistent with the Cichon and Koff findings.

The least stressful events which emerged from the original thirty-six items centered around the theme of pedagogical activities. Included in this pattern were such events as doing lesson plans, attending in-service meetings, and evaluating students. Cichon and Koff also found pedagogical events to have relatively little stress.

The results obtained from the fifteen additional items lend credence to the original thirty-six item findings (Table 3). Events 42, 43, and 50, which fall under the rubric "management responsibility", are high stress items. Events 38 and 45 relate to violence/student discipline and were found to be high stress items. Event 46, which is part of the pedagogical pattern, was a relatively low stress item.

One can infer from this research that teachers, whether in an urban or rural setting, apparently find less stressful those task-based teaching events over which they have direct control. Conversely, events which are controlled by management practices seem to cause a high degree of stress.

Research Issues

There are limitations to the research that must be addressed. The research was conducted in rural Eastern Kentucky, thus, the generalizability of the findings may be limited. In addition, the data was collected during one

period of time. If the study had been conducted during different times of the school year it is conceivable that some of the results may have been altered.

There are basic issues which should be the focus of future studies. As was noted earlier, the stress induced by specific events on the inventory did not vary widely according to the demographic characteristics (sex, age, type of school, school size). The characteristics are all "external" factors, however, which mediate an individual's perceptions of stress. What remains to be investigated in order to understand the nature of stress associated with teaching events is the relationship of perceived stress to "internal factors" such as "biological and physical threshold sensitivities, intelligence, verbal skills, morale, personality type, psychological defenses, past experience, and a sense of mastery over one's fate" (Rabkin and Struening, 1976; Cichon and Koff, 1980).

A second area which merits investigation is to determine if a high degree of stress is harmful to teaching performance. Maslach (1976) identified at least six mechanisms employed by professionals under stress which impaired their performance. Teachers were not included in Maslach's study, however. Would teachers react in similar ways as other professionals studied?

A third area of future study is concerned with whether the degree of stress felt by teachers in schools which are "effective" differs from teachers who are in schools that are "ineffective". For example, are "management practices" relatively less stressful in effective schools? Does the percentage of teachers who feel that stress contributed to illness (40.1% in Eastern Kentucky) decrease with increased school effectiveness?

Many of the most stressful events concerned physical safety and economic security. The rankings of events could be interpreted in terms of Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs. The rankings of events could also be interpreted

in terms of Herzberg's (1968) motivational and hygiene factors since there apparently is little stress from the work itself (motivational) and a higher degree of stress from management practices (hygiene factors).

Conclusion

The need to improve public education should be evident to all. As the National Commission on Excellence in Education noted in its report A Nation At Risk (1983), "If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war". This research suggests that a logical point of intervention into reducing the degree of stressful teaching conditions is the improvement of our management practices. By improving our management practices it is likely that we will also effectively wage war on our mediocre educational performance.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of the Sample

Variable	Categories	Frequency	Percent
Sex	Male	79	27.3
	Female	210	72.7
Age	30 or less	78	27.0
	31 or more	211	73.0
Type of School	Elementary (K-6)	137	47.4
	Secondary (7-12)	152	52.6
School Size	20 or less teachers	126	43.6
	30 or more teachers	163	56.4
Have you experienced any illness that you feel is related to stress?	Yes	116	40.1
	No	173	59.9

Table 2

The Teaching Events Stress Inventory

(Mersky, 1982) Rank	Mean	Inventory Item #	Event	(Cichon, Koff, 1980) Rank	Mean
1	73.43	11	Involuntarily transferred	1	73.05
2	70.71	7	Overcrowded classroom	5	57.52
3	68.57	12	Managing "disruptive children"	2	66.13
4	68.28	6	Notification of unsatisfactory performance	3	62.67
5	62.57	34	Denial of promotion or achievement	10	52.45
6	62.14	23	Lack of availability of books and supplies	6	55.93
7	61.86	16	Threatened by personal injury	4	60.76
8	60.14	8	Preparing for a strike	17	46.68
9	59.86	21	Target of verbal abuse by student	11	51.97
10	58.57	29	Disagreement with supervisor	12	50.73
11	58.43	3	Colleague assaulted in school	7	54.72
12	57.29	1	First week of the school year	13	50.00
13	57.29	36	Disagreement with another teacher	22	41.58
14	55.57	10	Conference with principal/ supervisor	28	36.69
15	55.57	18	Maintaining self-control when angry	14	48.39
16	54.71	25	Teaching students who are "below average" in achievement level	15	48.20
17	54.57	28	Teaching physically or mentally handicapped children	24	39.51
18	53.71	9	Change in duties/work responsibilities	19	44.79
19	53.00	26	Lavatory facilities for teachers are not clean or comfortable	26	38.89
20	52.57	2	Reorganization of classes or program	8	54.03
21	51.86	27	Taking additional course work for promotion	32	32.40

Table 2 (con't)

(Mersky, 1982) Rank	Mean	Inventory Item #	Event	(Cichon, Koff, 1980) Rank	Mean
22	49.14	31	Seeking principal's intervention in a discipline matter	21	42.48
23	47.86	15	Supervising student behavior outside the classroom	18	46.00
24	46.14	22	Evaluating student performance or giving grades	29	35.11
25	46.00	19	Talking to parents about their child's problems	33	31.84
26	44.14	30	Teacher/parent conferences	35	30.24
27	42.57	20	Dealing with students whose primary language is not English	34	31.30
28	41.71	13	Implementing board of education curriculum goals	9	52.76
29	40.29	17	Dealing with community racial issues	20	42.84
30	39.86	32	Maintaining student personnel and achievement records	16	47.34
31	39.71	33	Having a research or training program from "outside" in the school	30	33.90
32	37.86	35	Dealing with student racial issues	25	39.36
33	37.71	24	Dealing with staff racial issues	23	40.25
34	35.71	5	Attendance at inservice meetings	31	32.74
35	35.71	4	Voluntarily transferred	36	28.58
36	34.43	14	Developing and completing daily lesson plans	27	38.87

Table 3

Inventory Item #	Event	Mean
37	Not being able to reach your goals	68.29
38	Teaching students with an "I don't care" attitude	71.71
39	Little leisure time	61.71
40	Not being held in esteem by the community	57.43
41	Not getting enough sleep	59.86
42	Not knowing what the administration expects of me as a teacher	55.71
43	Lack of preparation time	62.29
44	Lack of adequate local funding	63.00
45	Too much permissiveness by parents	71.57
46	Lack of challenge in teaching	48.43
47	Lack of community support	61.29
48	Taking my teaching problems home with me	59.57
49	Lack of adequate state funding	63.71
50	Not enough administrative support	63.43
51	Lack of adequate federal funding	60.86

References

Bookover, W.B. and others, "School Social Systems and Student Achievement" in Schools Can Make a Difference. Brooklyn, N.Y.: Praeger Publishing Co., 1979.

Cichon, D.J. and Koff, R.H., "Teaching Event Stress Inventory". The National Association of Secondary School Principals Bulletin, March, 1980, pp. 91-104.

Edmunds, R., "Effective Schools and the Urban Poor." Educational Leadership, October, 1979, pp . 15-27.

Herzberg, F., "One More Time: How Do You Motivate Employees?" Harvard Business Review, January-February, 1968, pp. 53.62.

Holmes, T. and Rahe, R., "The Social Readjustment Rating Scale," Journal of Psychomatic Research, 11 (1967), pp. 213-218.

Maslach, C., "Burned-Out." Human Behavior, September, 1976.

Maslow, A.H., Motivation and Personality. N.Y.: Harper and Bros., 1954.

Mersky, R., "Teacher Stress in Eastern Kentucky." Faculty Research Grant, Morehead State University, May, 1982.

National Commission on Excellence in Education. A Nation At Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1983.

Pettegrew, L.S. and Wolf, G.E., "Validating Measures of Teacher Stress." American Educational Research Journal, Fall, 1982, pp. 373-396.

Rabkin, J. and Struening, E., "Life Events, Stress, and Illness." Science, 194 (1976), pp. 1014-1020.